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SUBJECT: GERMANY: KOSOVO RECOGNITION LETTER ON ITS WAY

¶1. (SBU) The German cabinet approved today (February 20) FM Steinmeier's proposal to recognize Kosovo's independence. MFA Western Balkans Deputy Director Marc Bogdahn told us that President Koehler, who has been on vacation in the German state of Thuringia, was expected to return to Berlin this afternoon to sign the letter of recognition, which will then be transmitted to Kosovar President Sejdiu.

¶2. (U) In a speech before the Bundestag after the cabinet decision, FM Steinmeier noted that Germany would have preferred a consensus solution on Kosovo status, but that nine years of fruitless efforts showed this was not possible. He emphasized that the case of Kosovo was unique and should not be viewed as a precedent for secessionist movements elsewhere in Europe. He also indicated that recognition was not the end of the road, but rather the start of a long process to help Kosovo, through the EU rule-of-law mission and NATO-led KFOR, to become fully self-sufficient as an independent country. Kosovo, in return, was expected to live up to its promises to protect minorities, respect human rights and to accept international supervision.

¶3. (U) While not enthusiastic about Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, most parliamentarians -- including those in the opposition -- acknowledged that there had really been no other alternative and that Germany was right to grant immediate recognition. Several talked about the need to offer Serbia and Kosovo a future in the EU, where national borders have lost much of their former significance. Only Left Party parliamentarians opposed Kosovo's declaration of independence and the German recognition of it, calling them a violation of international law and contrary to UNSCR 1244. These parliamentarians also raised concerns that Germany's recognition of Kosovar independence would encourage the Kurdish, Basque and Ossetian secessionist movements.

TIMKEN JR